

QA-399  
Harper House  
Centreville  
Private

circa 1887-90

The Harper House was constructed circa 1887-90 by Robert M. Price, a prominent Centreville businessman and owner of a successful local lumber business. The house is one of three large Victorian houses built in a row on South Commerce Street during this period. All three houses remain in remarkably pristine condition and together form the finest assemblage of Victorian architecture in the county.

The highly detailed exterior is softened somewhat by the modern white paint scheme, which replaces a dramatic contrasting scheme evident in an early photograph of the house. The exterior is distinguished by a fanciful roof turret, elaborate strapwork, stained glass window transoms and bracketed hood molds. Further decoration is derived from the original Eastlake porch and the cast iron fence that encloses the yard.

The interior remains virtually untouched aside from the kitchen and baths. Particular features of note include the original wallpapered cove cornice in the front parlor, a newel lamp at the foot of the stairs, a variety of fine mantel pieces, brass gas chandeliers and a wealth of other details.

## INVENTORY FORM FOR STATE HISTORIC SITES SURVEY

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

Dr. Robert Price House

AND/OR COMMON

Harper Residence

**2 LOCATION**

STREET &amp; NUMBER

203 South Commerce Street

CITY, TOWN

Centreville

VICINITY OF

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

1st

STATE

Maryland

COUNTY

Queen Anne's

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

## CATEGORY

☐ DISTRICT☒ BUILDING(S)☐ STRUCTURE☐ SITE☐ OBJECT

## OWNERSHIP

☐ PUBLIC☒ PRIVATE☐ BOTH

## PUBLIC ACQUISITION

☐ IN PROCESS☐ BEING CONSIDERED

## STATUS

☒ OCCUPIED☐ UNOCCUPIED☐ WORK IN PROGRESS

## ACCESSIBLE

☒ YES: RESTRICTED☐ YES: UNRESTRICTED☐ NO

## PRESENT USE

☐ AGRICULTURE☐ MUSEUM☐ COMMERCIAL☐ PARK☐ EDUCATIONAL☒ PRIVATE RESIDENCE☐ ENTERTAINMENT☐ RELIGIOUS☐ GOVERNMENT☐ SCIENTIFIC☐ INDUSTRIAL☐ TRANSPORTATION☐ MILITARY☐ OTHER:**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME

John F. Harper, Jr.

Telephone #:

STREET &amp; NUMBER

203 South Commerce St.

CITY, TOWN

Centreville

VICINITY OF

STATE, zip code

Maryland 21617

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE,

REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. Queen Anne's County Courthouse

Liber #: CWC 142

Folio #: 387

STREET &amp; NUMBER

Courthouse Square

CITY, TOWN

Centreville

STATE

Maryland

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

DATE

☐ FEDERAL ☐ STATE ☐ COUNTY ☐ LOCALDEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

**7 DESCRIPTION**

QA-399

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE	
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED	DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED			

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Harper House is located on the east side of South Commerce Street in Centreville, between Kidwell Avenue and Godwin Lane. It is the southernmost of three large Victorian homes built in the late 19th century by prominent local families.

The Harper House is of frame construction, 2 1/2 stories high, three bays wide and two rooms deep with a small, original rear wing.

The front facade, facing west to Commerce Street, is three bays wide, with the south bay consisting of a projecting cross gable. The front door is located in the center bay on the first floor, immediately to the left (north) of the projecting cross gable. The west facade of the cross gable is dominated by a semi-octagonal projecting bay with five 1/1 windows on both the first and second floor. There are three smaller 1/1 windows on the third floor centered in the upper gable and framed with decorative Victorian strapwork and ornate vergeboards.

The center and north bays of the front facade are set back approximately two feet from the projecting cross gable. The front entrance consists

CONTINUE ON SEPARATE SHEET IF NECESSARY

## CONTINUATION SHEET

## 7.1 DESCRIPTION

of double doors with a decorative transom and a bracketed hood mold. To the left of the door, in the north bay, a pair of large 1/1 windows projects slightly from the wall surface. A similar fenestration pattern on the second floor incorporates a single 1/1 window in the center bay and a pair of 1/1 windows in the north bay. A large square turret with pyramidal roof is centered on the building on the third story, with a paired 1/1 shed dormer to the left in the north bay. The turret is quite fanciful and highly decorative, with three 1/1 windows facing the street framed with decorative strapwork. The upper sash of these three windows incorporate a band of smaller stained glass panes around the border. The pyramidal roof of the turret is covered with wood shingles, including a band of fishscale shingles, and is topped with a decorative finial.

The front wall is covered with plain horizontal siding; the hip roof with asphalt shingles. All of the first and second floor windows have very fine stained glass transoms and, except for the bay windows, are protected by bracketed hood molds. An original one story porch with turned posts and Eastlake brackets stretches across the front facade.

## CONTINUATION SHEET

## 7.2 DESCRIPTION

The present owner has an early photograph of the house, taken from the southwest. The young saplings in the front yard, the absence of shrubbery or plantings, and the crisp character of the contrasting Victorian paint scheme suggest that the photograph was taken soon after the house was completed circa 1887-90. The rear of the Jackson Collins House is visible in the background, so the photograph was taken after the completion of that house (probably built circa 1892). Few changes have occurred since the photograph was taken. Iron cresting on the main roof and the dormer and a low wood railing around the roof of the front porch have been removed and the simple railing that now encloses the porch deck has been added. At first glance, the house appears to have had considerably more decorative detail, but on closer inspection it is clear that the shift from a contrasting paint scheme to plain white has made the brackets and strapwork much less obvious.

The south elevation of the house is broken up into two fields in much the same way as the front facade. The east half of this wall breaks forward in the form of an octagonal cross gable. A flush brick chimney rises in the center of the west portion,

## CONTINUATION SHEET

## 7.3 DESCRIPTION

flanked by 1/1 windows on both the first and second floor. On the cross gable to the east, there are paired 1/1 windows across the center on all three floors and single 1/1 windows on the flanking side walls on the first and second floor. All of the first and second floor windows have stained glass transoms and bracketed hood molds. The upper gable is further embellished with Victorian strapwork and paneled vergeboards.

The north facade has asymmetrical four bay fenestration. A cross gable adds emphasis to the second bay from the east, and a secondary service entrance with an adjoining 1/1 window is protected by paired 1/1 windows on the second floor and in the cross gable on the third floor. There are single 1/1 windows in the east bay and the two west bays on the first and second floor. All of the first and second floor windows have stained glass transoms and bracketed hoods.

The rear facade is broken up into several planes and has been altered somewhat on the first floor. The original 1/1 windows with stained glass transoms still survive on the second story.

The interior plan of the Harper House is relatively unusual. The double entrance doors open into a small

## CONTINUATION SHEET

## 7.4 DESCRIPTION

vestibule, with a second pair of inner doors opening into a center hall. This hall is L-shaped, turning 90° to the left or north at the rear. Single doors open into a front parlor and a living room. A large dining room is located behind the living room. A large kitchen and several small service rooms are located to the rear of stair hall (see plan drawing). What is particularly unusual about this plan is the nearly complete segregation of the service area from the rest of the house. The only way to get from the front hall to the kitchen is either through the dining room and the pantry or through a small, dark lobby entry to the north of the stair hall. To simplify the description of the interior, each principal room has been numbered and keyed to the plan drawing.

Room 101, Front Hall: As previously noted, the front doors open into a small lobby vestibule, with a second pair of inner doors opening into the hall. The floor of the vestibule is laid with parquet, the lower walls are finished with vertical beaded wainscoting below a molded chairrail. The inner doors, opening into the hall, have chamfered styles and rails, diagonal beaded paneling below the lock rails, and glass panels above etched with geometric and floral patterns.

## CONTINUATION SHEET

## 7.5 DESCRIPTION

The hall extends straight back to the rear, then turns 90° to the left. The stair is located against the rear or east wall of the L. It is a closed-string stair with a wide, paneled carriage, heavy turned ballusters and a large molded rail. The newel post at the foot of the stairs is also quite large and is surmounted by a brass newel lamp with an etched glass shade and crystal drops.

The southeast corner of the hall is curved and is pierced by an arched recess with a small statue of a young girl, inscribed "Good Morning" on the base. The north L of the hall is set off from the front hall by a simple plastered arch. Two doors in the north wall of this side hall open into a small washroom and a small vestibule for a side door. From this vestibule doors open onto an enclosed service stair to the second floor and into the kitchen.

Room 102, Front Parlor: A single door in the north wall of the front hall opens into the front parlor. This room is certainly the most significant part of the house due to the nearly pristine Victorian decoration. The fireplace is centered on the east wall, framed with olive brown tile and lined with geometric patterned firebacks. The mantel is walnut, with two shelves



## CONTINUATION SHEET

## 7.6 DESCRIPTION

supported by a pair of brackets and a spindle rail. Decorative plates are displayed on the lower shelf, protected by the railing. The hearth is also olive brown tile. The ceiling in this room has a plaster cove cornice and retains the original Victorian wall paper decoration. A gilt picture rail encircles the room just below the cove, and above this point the cornice is decorated with wall paper specifically designed for that purpose. A geometric band frames the top and bottom edge of the cove, with the field in between consisting of a vine and floral pattern completely encircling the room. This pattern breaks forward around the chimney breast and breaks in above the paired windows on the west facade. Two more bands of wall paper encircle the room on the ceiling. The first consists of a woven pattern similar to a cane chair seat, the second is a complimentary pattern of colorful flowers against a neutral background, framed by geometric bands of solid color. The dominant colors of the cornice wall paper are green and brown; the cane pattern is brown, tan, and white. The walls are cream colored with white trim. The lower part of the room has been painted on several occasions, and until recently the trim was dark.

## CONTINUATION SHEET

## 7.7 DESCRIPTION

A brass gas chandelier hangs from the center of the ceiling. The chandelier has six crystal glass globes and numerous crystal drops, similar to an earlier Waterford chandelier. It has been converted to electricity. A floral plaster medallion in the center of the ceiling forms the base for the chandelier.

The windows in this room, as well as the other principal first floor rooms, have stained glass transoms above the plain glass sash. All of the first floor doors have chamfered styles and rails and diagonal beaded paneling. Original molded baseboard and architrave trim survives throughout the house.

Room 103, Living Room: The living room is located at the front of the house on the south side of the hall. The fireplace is centered on the south wall of this room, and is embellished with a decorative brick mantel surround. Specially molded bricks incorporated into this mantel include 3/4 columns on the outside edge of each pilaster, corbeled brackets supporting floral terra cotta sideblocks, a band of leaf-shaped dentil blocks above the splayed jack arch lintel, and a band of egg-and-dart molding below the ovolo molded shelf. The hearth is ceramic tile. The ceiling has a cove cornice and a center medallion, but no decorative

## CONTINUATION SHEET

## 7.8 DESCRIPTION

wall paper or chandelier. The west wall is dominated by floor-length windows in a projecting bay. A wide double doorway opens in the center of the east wall into the dining room.

Room 104, Dining Room: A semi-octagonal bay window projects out from the south wall of the dining room, flooding the room with natural sunlight. A fireplace with a marbleized slate mantel surround is centered on the north wall. The fireplace has an arched opening and is fitted with patterned firebacks and a slate hearth. The ceiling has a cove cornice and center medallion with a brass hanging lamp with a frosted white shade. A door to the left of the fireplace opens into the front hall, a second door to the right opens into <sup>a</sup>combination passage/pantry that leads to the kitchen.

Room 105, Pantry: This small, plain room off of the dining room serves primarily as a passage connecting the kitchen with the dining room. Shelves on the west and north wall serve for storage of china and glasses. A door in the north wall opens into the kitchen, a door in the east wall opens into a modern bath, and a door in the south wall opens onto a small porch. According to family tradition, this small room was used in the

## CONTINUATION SHEET

## 7.9 DESCRIPTION

late 19th century to prepare communion for the Methodist Protestant Church across the street.

Room 106, Kitchen: This room has been completely renovated and modernized. A door in the west wall opens onto an enclosed cellar stair. A second door at the north end of this wall opens into the small vestibule of the side entrance.

Room 107, Bathroom: This small, rectangular room off of the pantry/passage may have served originally as a food pantry. It has been completely renovated for use as a bathroom.

The second floor plan is quite similar to the first floor. The stair rises to an L shaped hall, with three large chambers flanking the hall, corresponding to the three principal rooms on the first floor. The west end of the hall is partitioned for a smaller unheated chamber above the front vestibule. At the east end of the front hall, a door opens into a narrow back hall. The enclosed secondary stair from the first floor also opens into this hall. There are three rooms arranged around this back hall, <sup>a</sup>relatively large sleeping chamber to the northeast, a small store room to the southeast, and a bath to the south. These back rooms are quite plain in comparison to the larger chambers to the west.

## CONTINUATION SHEET

## 7.10 DESCRIPTION

Room 201, Front Hall: The stair rises to a landing against the north wall of the house, then turns 180 degrees and rises to the second floor. The stair landing is unusually large, with several "steps" under the large double window of the north wall. Evidently this was intended as a display area of some sort, and was probably furnished in some way. The north L of the hall is separated from the front hall by a simple plaster arch.

Room 202, Northwest Chamber: A fireplace is centered on the east wall, flanked by original closets on each side. The original Eastlake mantel surround survives in place.

Room 203, Unheated Chamber: Located at the west end of the hall, this small unheated room can be entered either from the hall or from the southwest chamber. It may have been used as a dressing room or a nursery at one time; it is now used as a sewing room.

Room 204, Southwest Chamber: A blocked fireplace with an Eastlake mantel is centered on the south wall, a large bay window dominates the west wall. The fireplace never had a hearth, so it probably was either fitted with a stove or served a purely decorative purpose. There is an original closet at the south end of the east wall.

## CONTINUATION SHEET

## 7.11 DESCRIPTION

Room 205, Southeast Chamber: A blocked fireplace with an Eastlake mantel but no hearth is centered on the north wall, with a door to the right of the fireplace opening into the adjacent bathroom. A large bay window forms the south end of the room; an original closet is located at the north end of the west wall.

Room 206, Northeast Chamber: This chamber is located directly above the kitchen and is clearly intended as a service quarter. The trim is much simpler than the rest of the second floor, and it is located at the back of the house, with access via the back stair and rear hall.

The third floor was not readily accessible.

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW				
<input type="radio"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION	
<input type="checkbox"/> 400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)	
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION			

SPECIFIC DATES

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Harper House is one of three large Victorian houses constructed in a row along South Commerce Street near the close of the 19th century. All three houses are in a remarkable state of preservation and together form the best assemblage of Victorian architecture in the county.

The Harper House was constructed by Robert M. Price, a prominent local businessman and owner of a large lumber yard on Broadway. Mr. Price purchased the house lot in 1887 and in the ensuing 15 years purchased three other smaller properties adjoining the original lot. The house was presumably constructed soon after the initial purchase in 1887.

In exterior form the Harper House is typical of many Victorian houses on the Eastern Shore in that a relatively traditional three bay 2 1/2 story house type with rear L and center passage plan has

CONTINUE ON SEPARATE SHEET IF NECESSARY

## CONTINUATION SHEET

## 8.1 STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

been adapted to the less ordered concepts of Victorian architecture. Projecting cross gables and banks of bay windows break up the elevation into several planes, while a square turret, bracketed hood molds, decorative strapwork, and stained glass enrich the facades. Yet under all of the decoration is a relatively standard, conservative Eastern Shore building.

The interior is similar, substituting an L shaped stair hall for the more common straight center passage, but retaining the basic order of the more traditional plan. The detailing of the interior is particularly rich and is virtually pristine. Details include a cove cornice in the front parlor with the original Victorian wall paper, an original newel lamp at the foot of the principal stair case, a variety of handsome Victorian mantel pieces, tile hearths, brass gas chandeliers and a wealth of other notable features.



**9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

CONTINUE ON SEPARATE SHEET IF NECESSARY

**10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY \_\_\_\_\_

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE

COUNTY

STATE

COUNTY

**11 FORM PREPARED BY**

NAME / TITLE

Orlando Ridout V, Historic Sites Surveyor

ORGANIZATION

Queen Anne's County Historical Society

DATE

9/21/81

STREET &amp; NUMBER

TELEPHONE

CITY OR TOWN

Centreville

STATE

Maryland

Field Notebook QA-XIV; Recorded December 8, 1979.

The Maryland Historic Sites Inventory was officially created by an Act of the Maryland Legislature, to be found in the Annotated Code of Maryland, Article 41, Section 181 KA, 1974 Supplement.

The Survey and Inventory are being prepared for information and record purposes only and do not constitute any infringement of individual property rights.

RETURN TO: Maryland Historical Trust  
The Shaw House, 21 State Circle  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401  
(301) 267-1438

GA-399  
Harper Residence  
203 S. Commerce  
St  
Centerville

BANDOLANE

WATER

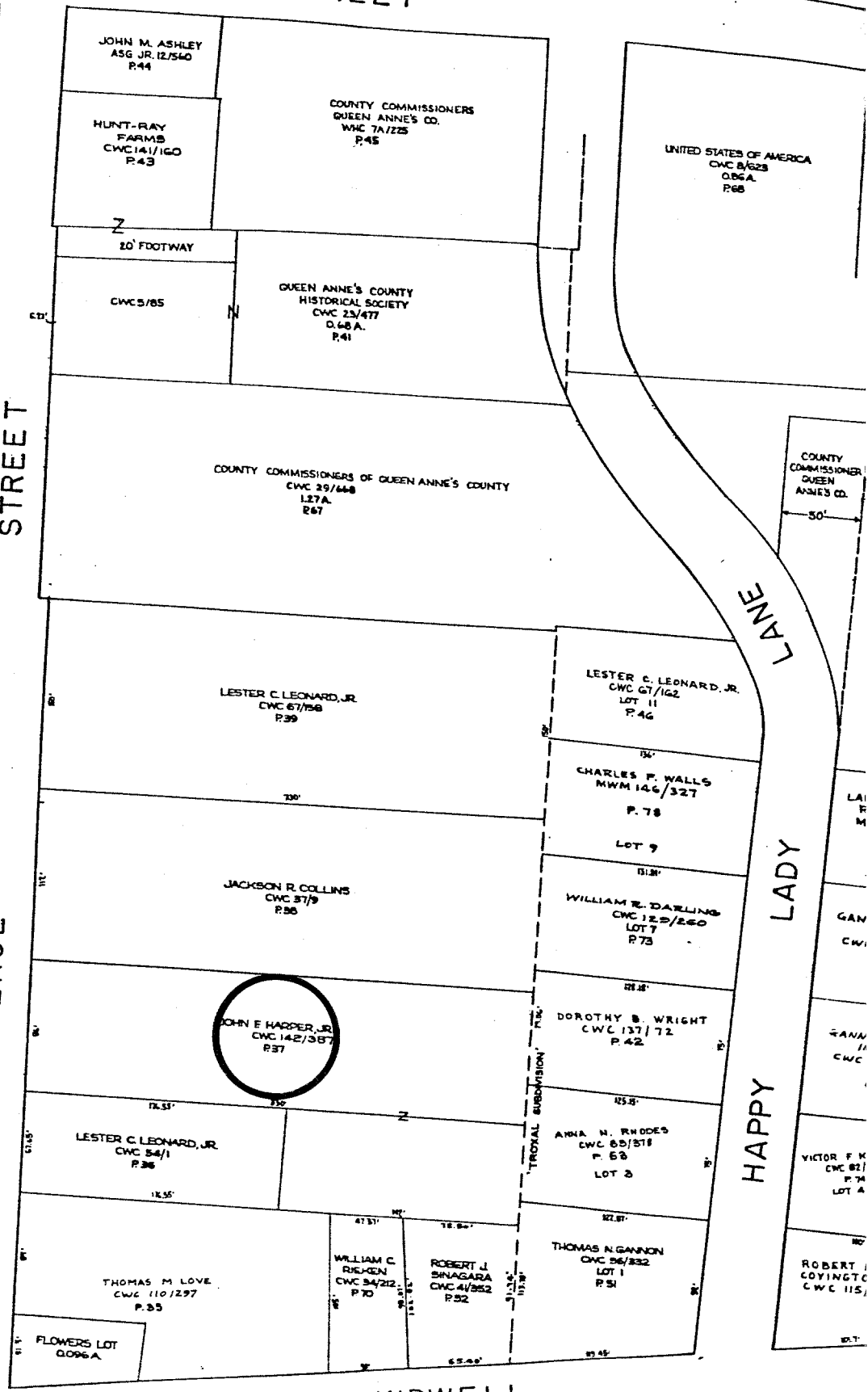
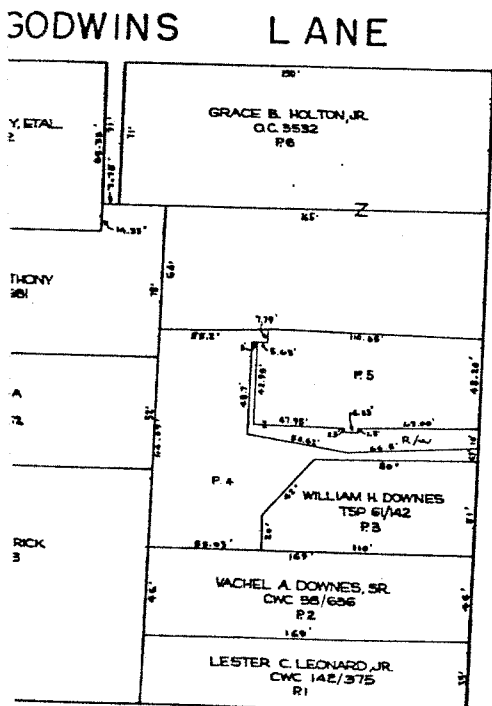
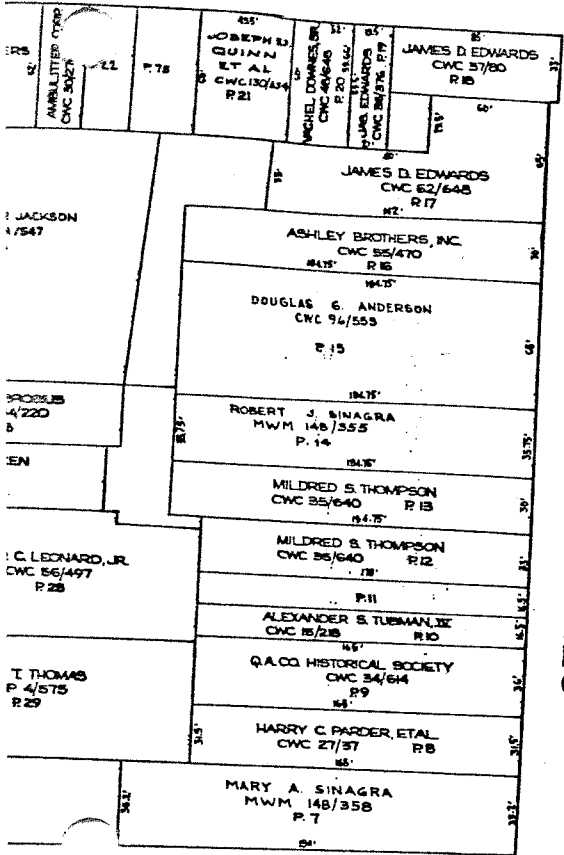
STREET

STREET

COMMERCE

LADY

KIDWELL



CH LANE

QA-399  
Harper Residence

Mary McCarthy  
Spring/Summer 2003  
Digital color photo on file at MHT





QA-399

Harper House  
South Commerce Street  
Centreville, Maryland  
Orlando Ridout V 1980  
Front facade from West



QA-399

Harper House  
South Commerce Street  
Centreville, Maryland  
Orlando Ridout V 1980  
View from Northwest





QA-399

Harper House  
South Commerce Street  
Centreville, Maryland  
Orlando Ridout V 1980  
Rear view from East